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Contact: Jonathan Godfrey
(202) 226-6888

Conyers Criticizes White House Wiretap Bill

Congressman John Conyers, ranking Democratic Member on the House Judiciary Committee, issued the following statement on the Republican FISA Legislation:

Let me state at the outset that I support our government intercepting each and every conversation involving al Qaeda and its supporters, which is now fully permitted under law. However, I cannot support legislation that not only fails to bring the warrantless surveillance program under the law, but dramatically expands the Administration's authority to conduct warrantless surveillance on innocent Americans.

First, it is amazing to me that we would even be taking up a law that fails to regulate the present domestic spying program. Nearly nine months after we first learned of the warrantless surveillance program, there has been no attempt to conduct an independent inquiry into its legality. Not only has Congress failed to conduct any sort of investigation, but the Administration summarily rejected all requests for special counsel or Inspector General reviews. When the DOJ Office of Professional Responsibility finally opened an investigation, the President himself squashed it by denying the investigators security clearances.

Second, the bill grants the Administration vast new authority to conduct warrantless surveillance on American citizens. Not only does the bill permit the warrantless surveillance of the international communications of any American who is not a specific target, but it grants the Administration new authority to conduct warrantless surveillance on domestic calls.

To make matters worse, the bill gives the Administration new unilateral authority to review the call records and emails of innocent Americans and permits the Administration to use surveillance devices without cause, thereby reinstating the discredited "total information awareness" program that kept records on hundreds of millions of Americans. Hidden in the fine print are provisions which grant the

Administration authority to maintain permanent records on innocent U.S. citizens, granting the Administration new authority to demand personal records without court review, and terminating any and all legal challenges to unlawful wiretapping.

It is no wonder the legislation is opposed by the Computer and Communications Industry Association - including Microsoft, Verizon, Google and Intuit -- 63 Law School Deans, 13 Former National Security Officials - including Reagan FBI Director William Sessions and Reagan CIA and FBI Director William Webster -- the Center for Democracy and Technology, and the Center for National Security Studies.

We all want to fight terrorism, but we need to fight it the right way, consistent with our Constitution, and in a manner that serves as a model for the rest of the world. This bill does not meet that test.

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